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Torrid tapes given X rating, add spice to Garrison trial

By ALLAN KATZ

The judge, jurors, witness, defendants and attorneys donned headsets yesterday to listen to tapes that may contain some of the most earthy language heard in a long time in a U.S. courtroom.

A not-in-the-know visitor to the courtroom of U.S. Dist. Court Judge Herbert W. Christenberry would have been surprised to see major participants in the pinball gambling trial of Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison and pinball company executives Robert Nims and Aruns Callery wearing earphones.

The visitor likely would have been treated to a second surprise if he stayed to listen to the taped conversations of former Vice Squad Commander Frederick Soule Jr. and government undercover agent Pershing Gervais.

In discussing arrangements for a complex bribery scheme (Soule has admitted taking part in it) the two created a tour de force in the obscene use of the English language.

In the course of their conversations, Gervais and Soule probably used every curse word in the language and often conceived spontaneous lively variations on standard obscene phraseology.

Apparently unable to discuss even the most mundane subject without liberally sprinkling their conversation with pungent vulgarisms, Soule and Gervais at least figuratively turned the air blue in Judge Christenberry's courtroom.

The judge, jurors, defendants and attorneys listened to the tapes through their headsets. But the tapes were played at full volume so that newsmen and spectators could hear them.

Unfortunately, the distortion factor in the tapes was so obvious that transcripts had to be provided for the news media while the spectators had to do their best to make sense of the whole business.

Many in the courtroom focused their attention on the women in the jury panel to se how they were responding.

The three women on the jury panel and the two sitting as alternates didn't even blink, so far as could be noted, as they followed the dialogue on the headsets and transcripts with which they had been provided.

In fact, their more serious concern seemed to be for their bouffant hairdos. Several reversed their headsets so the straps that ordinarily would go across the head were tucked under their chins.

The tapes were the first of many expected to play a key role in the government's case that seeks to prove Garrison was bribed by Mims and Callery to protect pinball gambling.

Since Gervais is the key participant in all the taped conversations, having been wired for sound by the U.S. Organized Crime Strike Force operatives during the investigation that took place in 1971, it seems likely that those in Judge Christenberry's courtroom will continue to get a graduate level course in the use of vulgarisms.